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Legalizing the Moscow Patriarchate in 1927: The Secret Aims of the Authorities

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Historians pay much attention to relations between the atheist Soviet authorities and religious organizations. In the early 1990s, it became possible to study not only the official policies in respect of the religions and the Church but also some secret aims behind them. As a result, we have a number of fundamental studies on Church-State relations in the Soviet period. They, however, predominantly consider either the first years after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution (till 1925 inclusive) or the war (1941-1945) and postwar periods.¹ What failed to be studied in depth was the secret aims that the Soviet authorities pursued in allowing the legalization of the Moscow Patriarchate (1927), an organization that refused to accept the communist (atheistic) ideology.

From the very start, the Soviets did not conceal their attitude to the Church. The Decree of the Council of People's Commissars (CPC) of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) "On the Separation of the Church from the State and of the School from the Church" deprived the Church of its legal entity rights. This meant that *de jure* the Church ceased to exist as a single organization. Only local religious communities could exist in legal terms, the authorities signing with them agreements on the use of Church property.² The Eighth Department of the People's Commissariat of Justice, which was due to put into practice the Lenin's decree, was officially dubbed "Liquidation" Department. It is the elimination of the Church, not its legalization as a social institution, that was the aim pursued by the "people's commissars" government. But the Bolsheviks failed to eliminate the Church at one go, entirely, and within a brief timeframe. Then in the early 1920s, the authorities changed their tactics, seeking to disorganize the Church from within and to crush it piecemeal. For this purpose, secret informers were actively implanted, and the church groups that were able to help the

authorities accomplish their tactical tasks were legalized and registered. Some cases in point are the Renovation and Gregorian schisms in the Russian Orthodox Church that sprung up between 1922 and 1925.

But their influence on the believers was minimal, and thus the plan to split the Church with their help failed. For this reason, the authorities, along with using the schismatic groups for their purposes, brought pressure to bear on the top hierarchs of the Patriarchal (“Tikhonian”) Church to force them into taking steps that would provoke indignation in the Church masses causing new divisions within the Church.

That the Patriarchal Church lacked a legal status was its major problem, for any administrative actions on its part were illegal and even criminal from the point of view of the Soviet laws. The Renovationists, however, and other schismatics came out to exploit their privilege of Soviet legality. The Soviets offered to legalize the top hierarchy both to Patriarch Tikhon and his successor (as of 1925), the patriarchal *locum tenens* Metropolitan Pyotr (Polyansky), but their condition was that its composition should be coordinated with the *OGPU* (United State Political Directorate under the USSR Council of Peoples Commissars) and that its further activities should be controlled by that organization. In the first place, the authorities wanted to lay their hands on the Church personnel policy. They were also strongly displeased with the activities of the Russian church emigré community, upon which the Moscow Patriarchate was supposed to come down with tough denunciations. For example, Patriarch Tikhon was urged to make an address containing this invective against the refugee hierarchs: “We repudiate, excommunicate and anathematize them, declaring them to be the enemies of not only our homeland and its peoples but also of our Holy Orthodox Church.”³ Metropolitan Pyotr was urged to do approximately the same. But neither Patriarch Tikhon, nor Metropolitan Pyotr accepted those legalization terms. In particular, not only did they not “anathematize” the church emigrés, they did not even dismiss, to the official indignation, their head, Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky), from the Kiev See which he formally held.⁴

The *OGPU* view on Church legalization was clearly set forth in the indictment in the case of Metropolitan Pyotr that was compiled in May 1926 by one A. Kazansky, Commissioner, Section Six, Secret Department: “From the first days of Soviet power and to the present, the Church behaved towards the latter as an irreconcilable anti-Soviet organization. For this reason, its most reactionary part has, to this day, no ecclesiastical administrative bodies of its own and enjoys a semilegal status. The necessity of going over to normal relations with the Soviet authorities has lately become particularly great, and the pressure brought to bear by the supporters of peaceful relations with the authorities has intensified. To establish normal relations, it was necessary (for the Church.—A.M.) to henceforth renounce all anti-Soviet activities. For it, therefore, the matter of legalization means, in the first place, a split into an irreconcilable (emigré) and loyal parts; moreover, it is quite natural that the latter will have to very energetically dissociate itself from the former and to consolidate the dissociation by a serious act, like making a denunciation, one suggested by certain Church figures, of those abroad for their counterrevolutionary activities.”⁵

Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) of Nizhny Novgorod, the acting patriarchal *locum tenens* after Metropolitan Pyotr’s arrest, also held talks with the authorities, in summer 1926, on legalizing his government. In June, he sent around his draft address to

the archpastors, pastors and the flock of the Moscow Patriarchate that argued the need for legalization in this way: “The lack of free registration for our church government bodies is creating for the hierarchy many practical inconveniences, imparting to its activities a kind of secret and even conspiratorial character, which, in turn, generates all sorts of misunderstanding and suspicion.”⁶ Thus, Metropolitan Sergius clearly hinted that the Soviets themselves were the main source of “misunderstanding.” The negotiations lasted till the fall of 1926 but yielded no result: the authorities wished to make the top hierarchy a tool in the fight against their political enemies, while Metropolitan Sergius kept to the same stance as his predecessors. “We cannot assume punitive functions and apply ecclesiastical punishments for vengeance,” he stated firmly in the same draft address; in 1926, he did not as yet depart from that position.⁷ This unwillingness to “be open” to the authorities made an early dismissal of Metropolitan Sergius from the Church government practically inevitable. In November, after the failure of a secret attempt to elect a Patriarch (the initiative for the election came from several bishops forming Metropolitan Sergius’ inner circle, and the main candidate was Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan (Smirnov), who knew nothing about the ballot), the authorities were given a good pretext for making a short shrift of the *locum tenens* and his supporters. Metropolitan Sergius was arrested in Nizhny Novgorod and later transferred, in mid-December 1926, to Moscow’s *OGPU* Inner Prison in Lubyanka.⁸

That was followed by a series of secret negotiations between *OGPU* representatives (mostly Evgeny Tuchkov, chief, Section Six, Secret Department) and leading Orthodox clerics. A vivid description of an episode in the negotiations was left by Yelena Apushkina in her essay *The Calvary of the Right Reverend Athanasius (Sakharov)*: “Before Metropolitan Sergius became the acting (an interim) *locum tenens*, Tuchkov offered his role to the archiereuses whose names were in the Patriarch’s will, to wit, Metropolitan Agathangelus and Metropolitan Cyril. It was claimed that Metropolitan Agathangelus had been prohibited from doing that by God’s fool (the blind Xenia) of Rybinsk, whom he held in much reverence. She said to him: ‘If you agree, you will lose all of what you earlier gained.’ Soon after that Tuchkov summoned Metropolitan Cyril and the latter consented to take the office, but he declined the attached condition. Said Tuchkov: ‘If we find it necessary to dismiss some archiereus, you will have to help us’. ‘If he is guilty of some ecclesiastical offense, yes. Otherwise I will say, ‘Brother, I have nothing against you, but the authorities are demanding that you should be dismissed and I have to do it’. ‘No, not this way. You must pretend that you are doing it of your own accord and find an appropriate charge!’ His Eminence Cyril refused. They say his reply was this: ‘Evgeny Aleksandrovich! You are not a cannon, and I am not a bomb, with which you want to explode the Russian Church from within!’”⁹

Failing with Metropolitan Agathangelus (Preobrazhensky) and Metropolitan Cyril (Smirnov),¹⁰ Tuchkov turned to Archbishop Seraphim (Samoylovich) of Uglich, who governed the Russian Church at that moment. Compiled by Kiev’s Georgy Kostkevich, a church figure, *A Survey of Principal Events of the Ecclesiastical Life in Russia for the Period from 1925 to this Day* commented on this episode as follows: “At that time, Archbishop Seraphim of Uglich was summoned to the Moscow *GPU*, where Tuchkov suggested that he should accept the notorious ‘legalization’ terms. Archbishop Seraphim refused, saying he could not consider himself authorized to decide the main issues of a fundamental nature in the absence of the imprisoned senior hierarchs. After three days at

the *GPU*, Tuchkov let Archbishop Seraphim leave for Uglich.”¹¹ An important detail of Tuchkov’s negotiations with Archbishop Seraphim was reported by M. Yaroslavsky, his lay brother, in his memoirs: “His Eminence said to me that the authorities had offered that he, as the head of the Church, should take the Synod... And they indicated who should be the members of the Synod. He refused... and was given three years of the Solovki prison camps right away... But he handed the Church over to no one, and wrote or said that he was declaring each eparchy autocephalous... Because each head of the Church was yet another candidate for jail... And after that he was immediately released... But when they were offering it to him, His Eminence Seraphim nominated all his members... I know that he mentioned Metropolitan Cyril... ‘But he is behind the bars’, they said. ‘He is behind *your* bars, and you must release him.”¹²

According to a letter written by Archbishop Seraphim a few days after his Lubyanka interview, Tuchkov said to him “at parting”: “‘We don’t harbor evil thoughts; we are releasing you and assign to you Uglich as your place of residence; you can officiate wherever you want, but under no circumstances can you govern. You should neither appoint, nor transfer, nor dismiss, nor reward’. ‘But what about inquiries from the eparchies, the current affairs’, asks Archbishop Seraphim, ‘you cannot stop the life, it will claim its own’. ‘Well, you can make purely formal replies. After all, you have declared autonomy. So what do you want? You have left no substitutes. So, you should act accordingly: You shall not send around any papers on the new government system. You can write to the eparchies that ‘since I have been denied government, you should manage on your own in your localities’. But if it comes to your head to write something, you send it to me with a trusted man, I’ll look it through and give you my opinion... As for now, goodbye. We’ll buy you a ticket and see you to the railway station; go back to Uglich and sit there quietly.”¹³ As we can see, the Archbishop of Uglich did not want to submit to Tuchkov’s dictates, pleading “humbleness.” Thus, the *OGPU*’s crude interference in the church affairs resulted in the current patriarchal *locum tenens* being actually prevented from governing the Church.

As he held his secret negotiations at the turn of 1927 with the top hierarchs of the Russian Church (both with imprisoned and those as yet free), Tuchkov certainly could not disregard the former acting *locum tenens* Metropolitan Sergius. Priest Mikhail Polsky, who fled Russia and later became a prominent figure in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, described in 1931 the negotiations between a “*GPU* agent” and the Nizhny Novgorod Metropolitan in the following way: “The agent complained that their alliance with the Renovationists had failed to benefit the authorities, whereas a union with the Orthodox Church was yet to be established. The Metropolitan, for his part, was lamenting the fact that the Church still lacked a legal central government. In general, both sides implied that the existing relations between the Church and the state were not beneficial for either. Then the agent offered some terms, whose acceptance and implementation would legalize the Church government and provide the Church with a journal of its own and other freedoms. The Metropolitan was due to organize a governing collegium under his control, or a Synod; all the affairs conducted by the Synod’s chancellery were always to be open to *GPU* agents; the appointments of archiereuses should be known to and authorized by the *GPU*; the Metropolitan was to publish an appeal to the Russian Church, one conforming to the new course of its life, and was to address the Russian Church Abroad with a proposal to stop its anti-Soviet propaganda and to pledge loyalty to

the Soviet power. The Metropolitan consented to all those terms.”¹⁴ True enough, the Priest Mikhail did not specify the source, from which he had obtained the details of the secret negotiations. He was only referring to some letter. Quite likely, the negotiations had not been as quiet and as business-like as he described.¹⁵ It cannot be ruled out that Priest Mikhail just reconstructed Metropolitan Sergius’ “significant conversation with the GPU agent” on the basis of some subsequent facts.

And the facts were as follows. On April 2, 1927, the *OGPU* Collegium heard an indictment in the case of Metropolitan Sergius and issued this ruling: “Stragorodsky shall be released from custody on a recognizance not to leave the city of Moscow. The investigation shall be continued.”¹⁶ According to *A Survey of Principal Events of the Ecclesiastical Life of Russia*, the Nizhny Novgorod Metropolitan was set free on the same day.¹⁷ Indicatively, like Patriarch Tikhon in 1923, Metropolitan Sergius was released while the investigation into his case was not discontinued. He was unable to “leave the GPU far behind.” It was evident that the authorities distrusted the priest and never relinquished an opportunity of blackmailing him: while the investigation continued, the measure of restraint in regard to Metropolitan Sergius could be instantly altered, and the recognizance not to leave could be changed to confinement. Five days after his release, Archbishop Seraphim handed over to him the government of the Russian Church. Another six days later, on April 13, 1927, Metropolitan Sergius notified Bishop Alexius (Gotovtsev), Governor of the Moscow Eparchy, that he had assumed the position of the acting patriarchal *locum tenens*.¹⁸

The unexpected release of Metropolitan Sergius confounded the clergy, their confusion only increasing at the sight of other bishops that had been arrested along with him being given jail terms and sent into exile or confined to prison camps. One of them, Bishop Athanasius (Sakharov), was given three years of the Solovki camps for “being a member of a group of archiereuses headed by Metropolitan Sergius.”¹⁹ In the meantime, the head of “the group of archiereuses” himself was not only released from custody but also received the right to live in Moscow, which he had lacked before his arrest. Of course, this caused a suspicion that it was not without an ulterior motive and that some secret agreement might have been made between Metropolitan Sergius and the *OGPU*.

Six weeks after his release, Metropolitan Sergius was allowed to convene a meeting of bishops (he had not enjoyed this opportunity in the first period of his acting tenure of office in 1926 either). The meeting was preceded by Metropolitan Sergius sending, on May 16, 1927, this letter to the Administrative Department of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (*NKVD*): “With a view to submitting a petition for the registration of the ecclesiastical government of the Orthodox Church (of the so-called Tikhonian orientation), I hereby ask to be allowed to hold, on May 18 this year, in my apartment a preliminary meeting devoted to the said petition. The meeting will be attended by six or seven archiereuses, whom I intend to invite as members of a projected Synod.”²⁰

In reply, Metropolitan Sergius received this certificate: “The Administrative Department of the Central Administrative Directorate of the *NKVD* hereby informs you that no permission from the administrative bodies is required for the holding on 18.05.1927 at No. 3/5 Korolenko St. (Moscow, Sokolniki), Apt. No. 1, owner Mr. Stragorodsky, of a preliminary meeting of 6-7 priests (‘archiereuses’) devoted to the establishment of their projected so-called ‘Synod of Tikhonian orientation’. The

application concerning the constituent meeting was taken into consideration. Recovered, one-ruble stamp-duty for the issue of this certificate.”²¹ Thus, a one-ruble certificate inaugurated the history of the legalized Moscow Patriarchate.

On May 18, 1927, the meeting of seven archiereuses (“priests”) did take place. According to an official document, Metropolitan Sergius addressed this proposal to the bishops he had invited: “Conscious of the need to have under me, as the acting First Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church, an auxiliary body, a Holy Synod, as authorized by the definition of the Council of 1917-1918, I decided, on the model of the deceased Most Holy Patriarch, to form under me such a Synod by way of inviting Right Reverend Archpastors, whose participation in the works of the Synod seems to me possible and useful.”²² The assembled archiereuses accepted the proposal and ruled to convert their meeting to a temporary Patriarchal Holy Synod.

The personal composition of the new Synod under the acting *locum tenens* was a target of much censure in the church circles. Kostkevich wrote this in his Survey: “When the names of the Bishops he had invited to the Synod became known, there could be no doubt whatsoever of Metropolitan Sergius’ capitulation to the Soviets. The Synod incorporated: Archbishop Silvester, a former Renovationist; Archbishop of Khutyn Alexis, also a former Renovationist, appointed to the Petrograd See on behalf of the Living Church after the execution of Metropolitan Benjamin; Archbishop Philip, former “Beglopovets,” that is, someone who once left the Orthodox Church for the Sect of “Beglopovtsy”; and Metropolitan Seraphim of Tver, notorious all over Russia for his connections with the *GPU* and trusted by no one.”²³ According to the memoirs of Archbishop Seraphim’s (Samoylovich) lay brother, the Synod now included precisely those hierarchs whom Tuchkov had attempted to thrust upon His Eminence of Uglich: “Metropolitan Sergius was soon released from custody... And he established a Synod made up of all those members whom the authorities had suggested to His Eminence Seraphim.”²⁴

Metropolitan Sergius himself seemed at first suspicious of the newly established supreme ecclesiastical authority. What if the *OGPU* arrests him again and the Synod will be declared his successor? In its cruel game with Metropolitan Sergius, the *OGPU* took a precautionary step by leaving his investigative case not closed when releasing him from custody. As he joined the game, Metropolitan Sergius also took some precautions and “to avoid all misunderstanding” stipulated from the beginning: “My projected Synod can to no extent be empowered to replace the individual principality of the Russian Church, but is only of significance as an auxiliary body under my person as the acting First Bishop of our Church. The powers of the Synod shall spring from mine and fall along with the latter.”²⁵

On the same day when the self-establishment of the Synod took place, its chairman filed an application to the USSR *NKVD*, which “humbly requested”

“I. To register me and my provisional Patriarchal Holy Synod for the superintendence of the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (of the Patriarchal orientation) within the confines of the USSR with the right to have under the Synod a chancellery, to use forms and the seal...

II. To leave instructions with the local authorities, permitting to register in the eparchies the eparchial and suffragan archiereuses (Old Church) that are within my spiritual province, along with their eparchial councils and chancelleries. From now onward, before the registration is forthcoming, I request your permission for me and the said Synod to enter upon our activities.”²⁶

On May 20, 1927, Metropolitan Sergius received a certificate on the temporary registration of the Synod. It ran as follows: “The application submitted by the acting ‘*locum tenens* of the Moscow Patriarchal See’ Metropolitan Sergius of Nizhny Novgorod, citizen Stragorodsky, and the list of the so-called ‘Patriarchal Holy Synod’, which was formed under him and is composed of the following members: Metropolitan Arsenius Stadnitsky of Novgorod, Metropolitan Seraphim Aleksandrov of Tver, Archbishop Silvester Bratanovsky of Vologda, Archbishop Alexis Simansky of Khutyn, Archbishop Sebastian Vesti of Kostroma, Archbishop Philip Gumilevsky of Zvenigorod, and Bishop Konstantin Dyakov of Sumy, were received by the Administrative Department of the *CAD NKVD* and taken into consideration. There are no obstacles to this body’s activities before registration.”²⁷ But Metropolitan Arsenius (Stadnitsky), an hierarch who might have lent prestige to the Synod in the eyes of the believers, became its member only on paper. The distrustful authorities did not let him come to Moscow from his exile in Central Asia.

Of course, the newly-established Synod fell short by far of what many within the Church had hoped it would be. Metropolitan Sergius himself saw this only too clearly. He explained the motives that had led him to establish his lackluster Synod in a May 1928 letter to the Exarch of Ukraine Metropolitan Mikhail (Yermakov): “There are writings claiming that we cannot accept the legalization until we are given everything that is necessary for a totally independent existence of the Church. In particular, ‘the Synod must be composed of those who are now in custody’. Of course, all of us share these wishes, but we must not be so naive as to expect that they should be put into practice, in response to our ultimatums. We cannot expect the state, which has up till now considered us as counterrevolutionaries, to become generous all of a sudden: that it would set everyone free and let us decide on our own what we please to offer the state. As is clear, this ultimatum will only result in projecting our illegality into the infinity. In the meantime, there are mounting signs of fatigue in our ranks, all those autocephalias, declarations, etc. It would be too one-sided to explain this fatigue away as faint-heartedness alone. It bespeaks the fact that the irreconcilability is transcending certain limits, becoming unjustified and unclear to many. Where there is no need to betray either the faith, or the canons, each reasonable person will ask this question: What is the matter?—and, naturally, lost is the wish to suffer for an unknown reason. And then, our eparchies will become autocephalous, one after another, and we will declare them as being in a schism, etc. Who needs all that and who is going to benefit? Clearly, we in the center will not perform our duty, if we fail to do all we can to forestall this collapse. We must not sacrifice the ecclesiastical well-being to the mood implying that the worse it is around here, the better. In particular, the fate of our exiled can only be expected to be relieved after legalization, and not immediately but step by step. At any rate, I realize that I had the right to convene the Synod and adopt measures towards the legalization, or, more precisely, it was my duty (if such an opportunity presented itself).”²⁸ “When the Right Reverend Sergius took upon himself the government of the Church, he assumed an

empirical approach to the position of the Church in the surrounding world and proceeded from the then existing realities, and I entirely agreed with him,” Patriarch Alexis I (Simansky) later explained to his biographer.²⁹

After the legalization of the supreme ecclesiastical government (a rather odd one, we should say), the legalization of the ecclesiastical government bodies was due to start at the level of eparchies, suffragancies and deaneries. On May 25, 1927 the Provisional Patriarchal Holy Synod under the Patriarchal *locum tenens* issued the following edict: “The Eparchial Right Reverends shall be notified for guidance respecting the establishment of the Provisional Patriarchal Holy Synod under the acting *locum tenens*, in the said composition and powers, that it shall be prescribed to them to tender on their part, with reference to this edict and its certificates, applications to the local authorities for their, the Right Reverends’ and the eparchial councils’ existing under them (which shall be provisionally formed via the invitation of the persons the Right Reverends shall indicate, this pending the election of permanent members by the eparchial councils) registration, as well as for the registration of the Right Reverend Suffragans; the composition of the district bodies (under the Suffragancies) and the deanery councils, ones that are not subject to registration under the law, shall be communicated to the district authorities for information.”³⁰

At first sight, the legalization terms of all Church Government Levels, as suggested by Metropolitan Sergius, were quite acceptable: under the Synod’s decree, the Eparchial Right Reverends were due to independently decide who should be invited to eparchial councils. For this reason, the May 25, 1927, decree was rather peacefully accepted for execution by the governing Bishops. This turn of events enabled some of them to embark at long last upon their duties and to run their eparchies. The authorities made Archbishop Paul of Vyatka, in March 1926, sign this recognizance: “I, the Archbishop of Vyatka and Slobodskoy, Pavel Petrovich Borisovsky, sign this recognizance-cum-pledge for the Vyatka Government *OGPU* to the effect that pending the organization of Vyatka Eparchial Board and its registration by the Vyatka Government Executive Committee I pledge not to govern the Eparchy, in particular, that I will not appoint, transfer or dismiss priests, will not send around the Eparchy any proclamations on behalf of the eparchial governor, will not issue sanctions (blessings) in administrative and organizational area to requests by the clergy, and will not solve marital affairs. For any breach of this recognizance-cum-pledge I assume the responsibility as for disobedience to the authorities.”³¹

During one and a half years, Archbishop Paul was languishing under the burden of this recognizance until he received this letter from Metropolitan Sergius in September 1927: “In view of the accomplished actual legalization under me as the acting patriarchal *locum tenens* of a supreme ecclesiastical administrative body, the Provisional Patriarchal Holy Synod, I deem it my duty to notify Your Eminence that you can freely arrive to the cathedral city of the eparchy committed to your charge and embark upon the performance of your archpastoral duties. At the same time, I suggest that upon your arrival Your Eminence should immediately enter upon the proper relationship with the local civil authorities to organize the eparchial government on the principles set forth by the Patriarchal Holy Synod in its May 25 edict this year, and should report to me about the subsequent, as well as general situation in the eparchy committed to your charge.”³² To quote a report to chief of Section Six, Secret Department, *OGPU* , sent by Priest Nikolay

Dulov, “‘Now we can write resolutions at our desks and in our offices’, a hierarch of Sergius’ ‘Synod’ said when this ‘Synod’ sprang up.”³³

Even Metropolitan Agathangelus (Preobrazhensky) of Yaroslavl, whose relations with Metropolitan Sergius were quite strained, hastened to tender an application to the Administrative Department of Yaroslavl Guberniya Executive Committee, asking for registration as the Metropolitan of the Yaroslavl Eparchy and the same for his eparchial council. The further fate of this application, however, shows well what aims in reality were pursued by the authorities in the course of the campaign to legalize the Orthodox Church. The Yaroslavl Administrative Department sent an urgent inquiry to the center respecting Metropolitan Agathangelus’ application, asking whether “this registration is acceptable.” It was not until over a month later that a reply came from the *CAD NKVD*. It confirmed that “the certificate on taking into account the list of members of the so-called Holy Synod under the so-called acting ‘*locum tenens* of the Patriarchal Synod’ was indeed issued.” It also stressed that the matter had been “agreed upon with the *OGPU* .” Further clarification implied that the issue of similar certificates on “registering” eparchial governments of the “Tikhonian orientation” was not to be rushed, and that it was necessary to wait till “exhaustive instructions and edicts regarding this matter, upon its coordination with the *OGPU* , are handed down by the *NKVD*.”³⁴ The authorities in other localities were in no hurry to respond to appeals by the “Tikhonian” archiereuses either. Instructions reading, “To be left without a reply for the time being”³⁵ were appended to the plea to register himself and his provisional eparchial council, as tendered by Bishop Arcadius (Yershov), acting governor of the Sverdlovsk Eparchy. In all evidence, the local authorities were also expecting clarification from the center.

It was not until October 31, 1927 that this long-awaited “clarification” from the *OGPU* , signed by Secret Department chief Terenty Deribas and Ye. Tuchkov, reached the Administrative Department of *CAD NKVD*: “In respect of your inquiry about the possibility of the bodies within the *NKVD*’s jurisdiction registering (Tikhonian) eparchial councils along with the registration of the so-called Sergius’ Synod, *SD OGPU* deems it necessary to communicate the following: 1) under the present conditions, it is necessary to deny official registration to the said councils; 2) however, under the condition in which somewhere, due to the circumstances of time and place, some eparchial councils do spring up after all, the local bodies of the *NKVD*, short of registering the latter, at the same time should not interfere with their functioning.” Finally, on November 17, 1927, in full conformity with the *OGPU* Secret Department’s “clarification,” the *NKVD* (in the person of its Deputy People’s Commissar and its acting *CAD* chief) handed down “exhaustive instructions” to the local administrative departments, which were contained in this circular letter: “In consequence of local inquiries regarding the registration of the so-called eparchial councils of the Tikhonian orientation in connection with the establishment of the so-called Sergius’ Synod, *NKVD RSFSR*, upon coordination with the *OGPU* , deems it necessary to announce.” Next there followed verbatim the two points from the Deribas-Tuchkov “clarification,” with a rider specifying that it was necessary to refrain from issuing not only the registration certificates but also even those concerning taking into consideration the lists of members of “the so-called eparchial councils.”³⁶

The official plan and what the coordination with the *OGPU* was all about was amply illustrated by reports to the center from the Leningrad office of that establishment.

The reports were addressed to “Comrade Tuchkov personally” and stamped “Top Secret.” As it transpires, the *OGPU* was in no mind to register the eparchial councils of the Patriarchal Church and their memberships suggested by the “Tikhonian” hierarchs. Its plan was to have them establish councils that suited the state security bodies. On November 26, 1927, it was reported to Tuchkov that, as early as August 26, the acting governor of the Leningrad Eparchy, Bishop Nikolay (Yarushevich), had sent to the Administrative Department an application asking to register his eparchial council. The *OGPU* turned down three out of seven protoiereuses suggested by Bishop Nikolay, including the dean (praepositus) of the cathedral church Protoiereus Vasily Veryuzhsky. Reluctant to send an official reply to Bishop Nikolay, the authorities were dragging their feet for almost three months. As the Leningrad “comrades” explained to Tuchkov, this was done “to expose the enemies.”³⁷ In other eparchies, where eparchial councils had emerged, the situation was much the same. As a result, the legalization in the provinces was a very selective affair. In August 1927, an opponent of Metropolitan Sergius commented on those goings-on as follows: “It is clear why the entire Church is not legalized by and along with the legalization of the Synod. It should have been this way, had the Synod really been the center of the Church, one united with it in thought and in life. But it is not so in real fact, and with the legalization of the Synod the Church continues existing in a disfranchised state, *for it is merely a new orientation, not the Church that is being legalized*, an orientation, incidentally, of a strikingly political nature.”³⁸ In fact, the campaign to legalize the government bodies of the Russian Orthodox Church that began in May 1927 actually came down to the *OGPU*’s secret effort to select and sieve the members of those ecclesiastical bodies.

In 1929, when the results were already obvious, Bishop Damascinus (Tsedrik) wrote this in his “Letter to the Legalized Ones”: “Fathers and brothers! While it is still not too late, do think and see into the essence of the ‘legalization’ that was graciously granted to you, lest you should later bitterly repent the mistake that all of you with Metropolitan Sergius at the head are now committing! What you are accepting under the name of ‘legalization’ is, in essence, an act of bondage that guarantees you no rights whatsoever, while imposing upon you some grievous obligations. It would be naive to expect anything other than that. The Communist Soviet Power is frank and consistent. It openly declared itself hostile to the religion and set the destruction of the Church as its goal. It never stops stating openly and clearly its theomachic tasks through its top governmental representatives and all of its minor agents. This is why it is very naive and criminal to believe that the so-called legalization by the Soviets is even partially seeking the good of the Church as its goal.”³⁹

The justice of Bishop Damascinus’ characterization of the legalization as an act of bondage that guarantees no rights whatsoever, while imposing some grievous obligations on those legalized, is confirmed by the fact that even Metropolitan Sergius’ Synod itself failed to be given a full-blooded registration. Apart from the abovementioned certificate of the *CAD NKVD* confirming that his request for legalization of the Synod “is taken into consideration” and that “there are no obstacles to the Synod’s activities until pending official approval,” Metropolitan Sergius did not receive, in all evidence, anything substantial.⁴⁰ Under the Soviet law (namely, an instruction of the People’s Commissariat of Justice and *NKVD RSFSR* of April 27, 1923) the Synod as a central organization could be duly legalized only as an “executive body of the All Russia Congress of the Religious

Community.”⁴¹ It was in this way that the Renovationist “Holy Synod” was legalized. According to a 1928 polemical document, the so-called *Canonical Study of the Doings of Metropolitan Sergius*, “Metropolitan Sergius did not hold those Church congresses, and the Sergian Synod was manned by him personally, in all evidence, by agreement with some Soviet body that plays in the RSFSR the role of the former Chief Procurator. One should think that the entire process of the Synod’s registration came down to a list of Synod members being presented by Metropolitan Sergius to the NKVD, where it was filed. At any rate, Metropolitan Sergius has no official NKVD document confirming the Sergian Synod as the executive body of the Old Orthodox Church. Thus, defective from the point of view of the Church canons, the Sergian Synod is of no legal significance under the civil law either.”⁴²

The guess of the author of the *Canonical Study* that Metropolitan Sergius had no official NKVD paper on the Synod’s establishment is confirmed by the correspondence between Metropolitan Sergius and Metropolitan Eulogius (Georgiyevsky), governor of West European Russian parishes. When, in October 1928, Metropolitan Eulogius for his own purposes asked to be shown, among other things, the act on the legalization of the Provisional Patriarchal Synod by the civil authorities, Metropolitan Sergius attempted to pass the matter over in silence. It seems clear that he felt embarrassed to send down an abracadabra like “there are no obstacles pending approval.” However, unaware of the awkwardness he was causing to his hierarchical chief, Metropolitan Eulogius continued “asking most insistently” that the documents should be sent to him. In February 1929, Metropolitan Sergius sent him a copy of the Preliminary Council’s May 18, 1927 decree on the establishment of the Provisional Synod, and accompanied it with this extensive remark: “As for the act on the legalization of our Synod that you ask to be supplied, I must explain that upon assuming the government of the Orthodox Church in the USSR on the basis of the canonically indubitable edict of the patriarchal *locum tenens*, neither I, nor the Provisional Patriarchal Synod I formed needed any particular civil legalization; since even before that, our Orthodox Church in the USSR and its government were not at all ‘illegal’, but existed and operated totally legally within the limits the [Soviet] Union laws granted to the religious organizations. His Holiness the late Patriarch quite legally enjoyed the rights as the head of our Church, and his name was openly mentioned in prayer in all Orthodox churches of the Union; he possessed a special patriarchal seal and in government used the assistance of his Synod. The same was used in government by the *locum tenens*, and his name continues being mentioned in prayer without hindrance in churches all over the Union. The difference between our former and present situation is that the Synod that currently exists under me has more members than under the late Patriarch.”⁴³

Thus, Metropolitan Sergius actually recognized that the 1927 legalization of the Church was unnecessary and that the status the Church had enjoyed under Patriarch Tikhon and the patriarchal *locum tenens* Metropolitan Pyotr was wholly acceptable. The authorities, not the Church, needed the legalization. And it was needed for full control to be established over ecclesiastical government. In addition it was meant to identify those who were unwilling to accept the atheist state’s control over the Church.

NOTES

1. N. Krivova, *Authority and Church in 1922-1925: Politburo and GPU in the Fight for Church Values and Political Submission of the Clergy*, Moscow, 1997; *Kremlin Archives. Politburo and Church: 1922-1925*, in 2 books, Novosibirsk—Moscow, 1997-1998; O. Vasilyeva, *Russian Orthodox Church in Soviet State Policies in 1943-1948*, Moscow, 1999; A. Kashevarov, *Church and Authority: Russian Orthodox Church during First Years of Soviet Power*, St. Petersburg, 1999; M. Shkarovsky, *Russian Orthodox Church under Stalin and Khrushchev: State—Church Relations in the USSR in 1939-1964*, Moscow, 2000; S. Petrov, *CC WPP(b) Politburo Records as a Source on the History of the Russian Church (1921-1925)*, Moscow, 2004; M. Odintsov, *Authority and Religion in War Years (The State and Religious Organizations in the USSR in the Years of the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945)*, Moscow, 2005 (all in Russian).
2. P. Gidulyanov, *Separation of the Church from the State in the USSR: A Complete Collection of Decrees, Ministerial Ordinances and Rulings by the RSFSR Supreme Court and that of Other Socialist Republics*, 3rd edition, Moscow, 1926, pp. 617, 623 (in Russian).
3. *The Investigative Case of Patriarch Tikhon: A Collection of Documents from the Central Archive of RF Federal Security Service (FSS)*, Moscow, 2000, p. 404 (in Russian).
4. See: A. Mazyrin, Priest, “The Issue of Appointment to the Kiev Throne in the 1920s,” *Vestnik PSTGU. Series II: History. History of the Russian Orthodox Church*, Moscow, 2007, Issue 2(23), pp. 58-67; Issue 3(24), pp. 118-131 (in Russian).
5. Central Archive RF FSS, f. H-3677, vol. 5, p. 247-248 (in Russian).
6. *Acts of the Most Holy Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Latest Documents and Correspondence on the Canonical Succession of the Supreme Ecclesiastical Power, 1917-1943*, Moscow, 1994, p. 473 (in Russian).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 474.
8. CA RF FSS, f. P-31639, p. 44.
9. “The Calvary of the Right Reverend Athanasius (Sakharov),” *Vestnik RSHD*, 1973, No. 1 (107), p. 187 (in Russian).
10. For more detail on the stance of Metropolitan Agathangelus and Metropolitan Cyril, See: A. Mazyrin, Priest, *Supreme Hierarchs on the Succession of Power in the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1920s—1930s*, Moscow, 2006 (in Russian).
11. [G. Kostkevich,] “Survey of Principal Events in the Church Life of Russia in the Period from 1925 to This Day,” *Vestnik PSTGU, Series II: History. History of the Russian Orthodox Church*, Moscow, 2007, Issue 2(23), p. 117 (in Russian).
12. “Reminiscences of M. Yaroslavsky (Transcribed by Priest Mikhail Ardov),” *Hope: Edifying Reading*, Issue 18, Basel—Moscow, 1994, p. 167 (in Russian).
13. “Archbishop Seraphim (Samoylovich) and Ye. Tuchkov: Details of a Relationship,” *Vestnik PSTGU, Series II: History. History of Russian Orthodox Church*, Issue 3(20), Moscow, 2006, pp. 131-132 (in Russian).
14. M. [Polsky], Priest, *Position of the Church in Soviet Russia: An Essay by a Priest who Fled Russia*, Jerusalem, 1931, p. 24 (in Russian).
15. Some books report [with reference to Metropolitan Sergius (Voskresensky)] that Metropolitan Sergius was threatened with the execution of his sister (she was executed by

the firing squad in 1937) and that of the arrested archiereuses and priests (V. Tsy-pin, Protoiereus, A History of the Russian Church, Book 9, Moscow, 1997, p. 157 (in Russian)).

16. CA RF FSS, f. P-31639, p. 55 (in Russian).
17. See: [G. Kostkevich,] op. cit., p. 117. The Survey gives the Old Style date, March 20.
18. See: "Patriarchal Chancellery Documents 1926-1927," Vestnik tserkovnoy istorii, 2006, No. 2, pp. 99-100 (in Russian).
19. Acts of the Most Holy Tikhon, p. 844.
20. "Declaration by Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky): Documents and Testimonies of Contemporaries," Dispute, 1992, No. 1, p. 190 (in Russian).
21. Archive of the St. Petersburg Eparchy, f. 3, op. 3a, d. 51, l. 1-2.
22. Acts of the Most Holy Tikhon, p. 499.
23. [G. Kostkevich,] op. cit., p. 118.
24. Reminiscences of M. Yaroslavsky, p. 167.
25. Acts of the Most Holy Tikhon, p. 499.
26. "Declaration by Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky)..." Dispute, 1992, No. 1, pp. 190-191.
27. Acts of the Most Holy Tikhon, p. 498.
28. State Archive of the Russian Federation, f. 5919, op. 1, d. 1, l. 415-416.
29. A. Kazem-Bek, "A Biography of the Most Holy Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexius I," Theological Works. Anniversary Collection: 120th Anniversary of the Birth of the Most Holy Patriarch Alexis I. The 80th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Patriarchy, Issue 34, Moscow, 1998, p. 98 (in Russian).
30. Acts of the Most Holy Tikhon, pp. 499-500.
31. Archive of RF FSS for Kirov Region, d. SU-11383, t. 1, l. 5.
32. State Archive of the Kirov Region, f. 237, op. 77, d. 1, l. 6-6 ob.
33. CA RF FSS, d. H-7377, t. 6, l. 255.
34. "Declaration by Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky)..." Dispute, 1992, No. 1, pp. 192-193.
35. "The Time of Troubles in the Russian Orthodox Church: Documents of the Urals Eparchies of the 1920s," Arkhivy Urala, 2006, No. 9-10, pp. 128-129 (in Russian).
36. "Declaration by Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky)..." Dispute, 1992, No. 1, pp. 201-202.
37. "'Top Secret. Urgent. Personal. To Comrade Tuchkov:' Reports from Leningrad to Moscow, 1927-1928," A Theological Collection, Issue 10, Moscow, 2002, p. 366 (in Russian).
38. "On Church and State: Materials of the Late 1920s Polemics," A Theological Collection, Issue 10, p. 350 (in Russian).
39. "'Justice of Heaven is Performed over the Russian Church and People': Archive Materials for a Life of the Priest-Martyr Damascinus, Bishop of Starodub (1877-1937)," A Theological Collection, Issue 10, pp. 438-439 (in Russian).
40. Soviet student of religion A. Shishkin (and after him certain Church historians) wrote that "In August [1927], it [the Synod] was established." See: The Essence and a Critical Evaluation of the "Renovationist" Schism in the Russian Orthodox Church, Kazan, 1970, p. 303 (in Russian). But he quoted no documents. M. Gubonin's Acts of the

Most Holy Patriarch Tikhon provides a list of documents that mentions the decree by the acting patriarchal *locum tenens* Metropolitan Sergius of Nizhny Novgorod No. 380 of September 22, 1927 on the legalization of the Patriarchal Holy Synod, but the decree itself is lacking. This mention cannot warrant the conclusion that “in September, the central ecclesiastical government of the Patriarchal Church was at last given a permanent registration in the bodies of Soviet power.” (A. Beglov, “Eparchies and Bishops of the Russian Church in 1927, or Why Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) Started Transferring the Eparchial Right Reverends?”, *Alpha and Omega*, 2007, No. 2(49), p. 172 (in Russian).).

41. See: P. Gidulyanov, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

42. SA RF, f. 5919, op. 1, d. 1, l. 370.

43. “From the Correspondence of the patriarchal *locum tenens* Metropolitan Sergius of Nizhny Novgorod (Stragorodsky) and Metropolitan Eulogius (Georgyevsky), Governor of the Orthodox Russian Churches in West Europe. January 1928—March 1929: Archive of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchy,” *Tserkov i vremya*, 1998, No. 3(6), pp. 110, 116, 119 (in Russian).